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LI Peng

(Phonetic: lee) (2621/7720)

*Premier, State Council (since 1988);
Member, Standing Committee, Politburo,
Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (since 1987)*

Addressed as: Mr. Premier

Li Peng, currently the second-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee, is one of China's most powerful and least popular leaders. Rumors in the Hong Kong press claim that Deng Xiaoping intends to replace Li as Premier at the end of his term in 1993—possibly by promoting him to the largely symbolic post of president. The same media note that, although Li is generally regarded as an advocate of economic recentralization, during the past year he has stressed the need to revitalize the economic reform program, possibly in an effort to retain the premiership. While visiting Guangdong Province in 1991, he praised its rapid development as proof that reform policies work and noted the importance of production meeting the needs of the market. He has also advocated tax reform, assured foreign officials that China will continue its open-door policy, and reiterated his support for price reform and special economic zones.

Li's stance on social and political issues nevertheless remains less flexible. After the collapse of Communist rule in the Soviet Union in 1991, he publicly stressed China's adherence to socialism, despite changes in the international political environment. He has told foreign media that a multiparty system would be inappropriate for China and would produce only chaos.

Li was born on 20 October 1928. In 1931 his father, an early Communist leader, was killed by the Kuomintang, and Li came under the protection of Zhou Enlai, who became Premier under Mao Zedong. At 18, Li joined an elite group of Chinese students studying in the Soviet Union, where he remained for seven years. He worked with Soviet advisers during the early part of his 26-year career in the electric power industry. Because he was under Zhou's protection, he was not purged during

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the Cultural Revolution. Li launched his national career as Vice Minister of Electric Power in 1980 and became Minister the following year. In 1983 he leapfrogged several more senior leaders to become a vice premier; he was promoted to the premiership in 1988.

As Premier, Li frequently travels abroad. He speaks English. He visited several European nations before and after a trip to the United States in January 1992 to attend a UN Security Council summit. In June he again visited Europe before attending the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil. That trip was the most recent in a series of overseas tours he has made since the Tiananmen crackdown in June 1989, visiting the Soviet Union, North Korea, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia. Li's wife, Zhu Lin, graduated from the Harbin Foreign Language College and has spent her career in the electrical sector; she now heads the Beijing office overseeing the Daya Bay nuclear power plant near Hong Kong. The couple's daughter and one of their sons also work in the power industry; the other son is a major in the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Li and Zhu have three grandchildren.

7 January 1993